

## Black Holes Everywhere

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By Stefan Grund (editor)

Powers of attraction beyond the event horizon: Performance theatre by Susie Wang and techno vaudeville by feminist artist Peaches at Kampnagel's summer festival

"We're not too keen on the future", is the cold answer the female museum attendant in a fictional world of the distant future gives to the recently heavily pregnant mother, who has just lost her baby to a black hole in the floor. With her belly split open, metres of umbilical cord trailing out, and her breast bitten off, the mother protests that she cannot do as she is told and leave the exhibition without her child, her whole world, her future. Next to her, her husband writhes on the ground in a pool of his own blood, his penis having been severed as he tried to save the child from the hole. The penis is now rotating in a jar next to him, suspended in fluid. "You will regret that", replies the mother to the attendant, who, as has been clear for a while, is an agent of the evil, monster or dark force, whatever it is, that lurks in the black hole under the floor.

Optically, acoustically and emotionally, the scene is simultaneously one of pure horror and the pure satire of horror. "Mummy Brown" by the Norwegian theatre group Susie Wang (founded by Trine Falch and Bo Krister Wallström of Baktruppen, a collective that has created noteworthy postdramatic theatre throughout Europe since the 1980s) is a devastating evening of engagement with questions of post-postdramatic interpretive authority over theatrical symbols of temporality (or signs of the times). In this theatrical fantasy, the audience become augurs, whose imaginations conceal the real abysses, the true black holes. We are often left to squirm, unsure whether to laugh or cry. Several women left during the performance, unable to cope with what they were being shown. The art here is in the fears of the beholder.

The scene is a fictional museum of the future – a cold, marble hall containing an exhibition of historical holes. Eight of them consist of gold and silver objects arranged on plinths in two symmetrical rows. They include: a golden handbag, a revolving egg, and a jagged silver nugget with tubes that is said to have come from outer space. Only one is a black hole in the floor. Several visitors, in tourist outfits, are led through the exhibition by the attendant, always with the same words: "It's from the past", "You can touch it", "Watch the hole in the floor. It's very deep."

Conveniently, there is no barrier to stop the visitors from plunging into the hole, but at first, they are all able to negotiate the danger successfully. At the very front of the stage, facing the audience, there is a kind of hoop, the centre of which, naturally enough, is a large hole. Directly upstage from it is a white bench for the use of museum patrons. The catastrophe is triggered by a menstruating woman who sits on the bench, leaving a red stain. The attendant, who fails in her efforts to wipe away the blood, covers it with a handkerchief, which she sticks down with spittle. The scent of blood appears to awaken the monster in the black hole, which begins unexpectedly to generate a powerful pull. As if caught in the suction of a vacuum cleaner, the pregnant woman is first pulled towards the hole and then, when her belly fills the hole completely, the baby is sucked out of her. The umbilical cord, here an umbilical rope or cable of several metres in length, connects her visibly with the invisible world.

Kurt Tucholsky once offered the following definition: "A hole is there, where something isn't. The hole is a permanent companion of the non-hole; I'm sorry, but there is no such thing as a hole by

itself. If there were something everywhere, there would be no holes, but there wouldn't be any philosophy either, not to mention religion, which is holey in origin." To begin with, nothing comes out of the hole in Mummy Brown, but some things do go in, and some are later spat back out, having been mutilated. Just not the baby, whose mother follows him to his terrible fate, while the father, his penis now reattached (the attendant having used her knitting materials to perform this charitable act as a means of getting rid of him), is able to leave the building. All in all, the exhibition of holes is a valuable contribution to existential philosophy, ontology, religion and the history of theatre.

As with Susie Wang (with Martin Langlie and Mona Solhaug alongside Falch and Wallström), the second premiere on Thursday also featured holes and repetitive statements. Peaches is a Canadian-born feminist artist who lives in Berlin. She and her fellow performers brought a techno vaudeville production entitled "There's only one peach with the hole in the middle" to Kampnagel's large K6 hall. She sang her techno anthems bare breasted, surrounded by dozens of scantily dressed male and female dancers. But in place of lines from the play like "It's from the past" or "Watch the hole", the audience were treated to lyrics such as "You don't fuck", "Are the motherfuckers ready for the fatherfuckers", "Shake yer dix, shake yer tits" or "Whose jizz is this?". The last of these is also the title of Peaches' first exhibition, which can currently be seen at Hamburg's Kunstverein.

And while the exhibition plays cleverly and humorously with gender stereotypes, in the form of an imaginative narrative, in which hundreds of "double-masturbator" sex toys develop an autonomous identity as "Fleshies" and turn up again in a 14-scene deconstructivist musical, even warbling a song or two, the electroclash performance, using extreme volume and a dazzling laser show, was far from allegorical, but rather went straight for the throat. There, where there is no thing, bright lights repeatedly flashed on the performers' bodies. Maybe it was a desperate attempt to escape the power of attraction of the black holes, beyond one's own event horizon.

*Dates: 17 August, 9 p.m., K6, Peaches: "There's only one peach with the hole in the middle"; 17 August, 7 p.m. and 9 p.m./ 18 August, 7 p.m., K1: Susie Wang: "Mummy Brown"*